THE PLACE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN MODERN RESEARCH

It is not unnatural that, on an occasion like this, one should think of the men of the past whose labours, whether recognised or not, have combined to bring the study of the Old Testament to its present stage, and the subject which I have chosen for this inaugural lecture will, perhaps, enable us to understand alike our debt to them and the task they have handed on to us.

As I think more especially of the names in this University, and, in particular, of my predecessors in the Chair which it is my high lot to fill for a few years, the name that first arises is that of the late Robert Hatch Kennett. Many of us knew him as one of the kindliest and most stimulating of men, one to whom his pupils—among whom I am proud to have a place—and his colleagues

have so recently united in paying spontaneous tribute for all that he meant for them. To follow upon one so gifted as he was is difficult; for he was one whose enthusiasm for his own work he was successful in imparting to others; and all that I can hope is that my own attempt to promote the studies with which this ancient post is associated may show that I am not unmindful of my responsibilities[1].

The history of the development of Oriental studies—in particular of Hebrew and the Old Testament—is a fascinating one. For some four or five centuries they have flourished in unbroken continuity, such that at the present day we find ourselves borne along, as it were, upon a steadily flowing stream which, indeed, cannot be stopped, though, to be sure, we may shape its course. What that course will be one cannot foretell, but it is only as we observe the trend of centuries of research in these studies that we obtain a true insight into the possibilities of their future.

My subject, "The Place of the Old Testament in Modern Research," is necessarily bound up both with the growth of intelligent

interest in Oriental and Biblical studies and with the particular aspects, questions, or even controversies, which, at one time or another, have held the stage. The progress of our several studies depends upon our special problems which are felt to be of primary importance, and upon their relation to other problems perhaps of more immediate or practical or popular interest. The particular problems in our field to-day are not those of the past; yet when, for example, the burning question was the antiquity of the Hebrew vowel-points, this was not a merely academic controversy, but was involved in the graver question of verbal inspiration. In like manner, the literary problem of the composition of the Pentateuch and the archaeological problem even of the fall of Jericho are not merely of academic importance or for specialists alone, in that profounder matters, whether they are always visible or not, may be found lurking not far distant.

The question of the Place of the Old Testament in Modern Research turns out to be bound up with the history of thought. To

have put the title of this lecture in the form of a question would recall the fact that in Hebrew the rhetorical question is a forcible denial, and that there are, in truth, those who for one reason or another are convinced that the Old Testament no longer has any value for us, or at least for our research. Moreover, there are those, also, who believe that the major problems of the last generation have been settled finally, and that the Old Testament has left little for active minds to pursue. On the other hand, yet others are there who believe that these problems are still far from solution; and sometimes it would almost appear as though certain fundamental questions which are the concern of the Old Testament student and which, one thought, had been settled once and for all, are again cast into the melting-pot. Now it is not my intention to discuss here the rights or wrongs of what is known as the Higher Criticism; there is something more vital than the question whether the views of such and such men are conservative or moderate or advanced, it is the necessity of understanding and of re-

stating the place of Old Testament study in the world of scholarly thought.

I propose, first, to touch very briefly upon the growth of Semitic and Biblical studies in the West, and I may be pardoned if, while not indifferent to the international character of research, I make special reference to this University. I shall then say something on the nature of Old Testament research of the last few decades. From the way in which different lines of study have contributed to our present knowledge of the Old Testament and its field, I shall pass to the way in which the debt is being repaid. It seems to me that our newer knowledge of what, in old-fashioned language, we call the "Bible lands" has much to contribute to the profounder problems which are not the concern of the mere Hebraist or of the student of the Old Testament as such. Here it is that, as I believe, one can show the very real importance of our study, and that if the Bible was once, in a sense, the centre and criterion of all knowledge, it is regaining a position in the world of thought which manifests anew

its uniqueness, and its significance for research.

The growth of Hebrew and other Semitic studies in the western world has been traced by competent pens[2]. For many centuries Christians desirous of information on the interpretation of the Old Testament were perforce obliged to consult Jews, some of whom, as we know, were converts. There were a few Christians—of whom the Venerable Bede (about A.D. 700) may have been one—who seem to have possessed a small knowledge of Hebrew; and there were not a few who found a mystical value in the Hebrew script and a certain magical potency in the Hebrew language, and, then as now, it would happen that an untutored and more or less emotional interest in the strange and the curious would sometimes lead to an interest that was more intelligent and fruitful.

One would like to dwell upon the part played by Arabs and Jews in the transmission of learning during the so-called Dark Ages: the School of Baghdad, the different migrations westwards along the shores of the

Mediterranean to Spain and France, the renown of Jewish physicians, the theological and philosophical activity of Semites who directly and indirectly provoked—and not always in the best sense of the word—the scholars of Western Europe. These Orientals had much to contribute to the West, although, even in the thirteenth century, Roger Bacon, himself "a tolerable Hebrew scholar," could lament that among the Latins there were not four who had a grammatical knowledge of Hebrew, or Arabic, or even Greek. However, we are indebted to Dominican and Franciscan missionary zeal for the encouragement of Oriental studies in Europe, and the year 1276 is marked by the first Oriental College, Raymond Lull's, in Mallorca. It was at Miramar, and the visitor to that lovely site will deplore the old-time depressing notion in this country that learning would flourish best in surroundings less conducive to physical well-being.

Those were days when Arabic and Hebrew were being studied by men whose lives were devoted to converting Saracen and Jew. But

to confute the Semite and to proselytise were not their only aims. There were men interested in going behind the corrupt text of the Latin Vulgate; and while Philosophy, Astronomy and Astrology, Mathematics and Medicine turned some to Arabic and Hebrew learning, others, men of Neo-Platonic sympathies, were fascinated by the Jewish mystical Kabbalah, or, in reaction against an arid scholasticism, found new and more refreshing treasures in the religious literature of the Jews. The part played by this medieval Jewish mysticism in the history of Hebrew studies is a curious little chapter in itself.

But it was not until the sixteenth century that Oriental research was definitely started on its course, and this University begins to take a leading part. Passing over John Fisher's lectureships in Greek and Hebrew (1501), we note first the famous school of theology at Louvain, the Collegium Trilingue, exclusively devoted to the study of Latin, Greek and Hebrew. It was visited by men from Cambridge, and notably by Robert Wakefield. Hebrew professor at Louvain

(1515), he succeeded in establishing a reputation successively at Tübingen, Cambridge (1524) and Christ Church, Oxford (1530), and was reputed the first linguist of his time.

Those were days of practical enthusiasm for the new learning, and whereas a couple of centuries earlier we read, for example, that the Abbot of Westminster in 1325 sent to Oxford a contribution of 17½*d.* "for the expenses of the masters lecturing in the Hebrew, Arabic and Chaldean languages at the University," now, on two occasions when Cambridge was suffering from serious financial stringency, the University lecturer in mathematics was suspended in order that his stipend might go to the lecturers in Hebrew and Greek[3].

When, in 1540, the Regius Professorships were established here—the first instalment of the funds from the dissolution of the monasteries—an immediate impetus was given to the study of Greek and Latin. But the Hebrew professor, Thomas Wakefield, a younger brother of the more famous Robert, suffered through the religious controversies

of the age, his tenure of office was intermittent, and a series of foreigners, Jews, including the famous Fagius and Tremellius, leave their mark upon Hebrew studies[4]. Even in the seventeenth century we have to look, for the best work, outside the Hebrew Professors, and Ralph Cudworth, the great leader of the Cambridge Platonists, has scarcely any Hebrew reputation save as regards the composition of such odes as then and later were expected of the occupants of the Chair[5].

Yet splendid work was done in that century. It must suffice to refer, quite summarily, to the Authorised Version, and the great Arabists: William Bedwell of Cambridge with his renowned Oxford pupil Edward Pococke, and Abraham Wheelock, the first Arabic Professor, and his famous pupil Thomas Hyde, later of Oxford. John Selden of Oxford opened out a new world by his researches in Semitic Mythology (1617), and John Spencer, Master of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, has not unjustly been styled the founder of Comparative Religion. Rabbinic studies flourished, through the remarkable